Miranda Fricker and Michael Brady (eds.), *The Epistemic Life of Groups,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 272 pp.

Can groups hold, revise and reject beliefs? Are collective doxastic attitudes reducible to what is believed by individual members or do they presuppose some additional joint commitment? How can we resist the sway of social stereotypes when assessing others as moral and intellectual agents? Are emotions always a hindrance to epistemic goals and is the apparent conservatism of scientific groups indeed a deviation from usual collective behavior? Departing from analytic epistemology's traditional focus on individual agents who operate in something akin to a social vacuum, this volume explores the epistemic features of group agency. Its contributors inquire, for instance, to what extent collective processes of attaining and revising beliefs can be equated with their individual counterparts, and whether belonging to a particular intellectual environment can generate morally corrosive prejudice. The volume consists of four thematic clusters concerning epistemology as such, moral epistemology (understood as the practice of attaining beliefs about actions related to morally valuable outcomes), politics and science. However, portraying the work as a handbook one should recommend to a novice would—despite its stated introductory aim—be somewhat misleading, as it presupposes considerable familiarity with prior discussions on testimony, epistemic injustice, deliberative democracy, assertion, Kuhnian philosophy of science, and like. The actual importance of certain articles, such as Miranda Fricker's apt revision of the overly optimistic approach to implicit biases she had argued for in her earlier works, can only be fully appreciated if one is well-acquainted with recent trends in social epistemology. Taken as a whole, nonetheless, *The Epistemic Life of Groups* presents the reader with a range of engaging topics that merit further attention. For the love of simplicity, I will remain true to the volume's structure in offering brief comments on each essay.

Epistemology. Sandorf Goldberg opens the first section with the claim that criteria for considering an assertion proper depend on the intellectual community under whose auspices it is uttered. Within the context of some conversational group riddled with such pervasive disagreement that hopes for attaining knowledge dwindle, assertions are proper as long as they serve the group's informational purposes and can be reasonably expected to be understood by other members. Although Goldberg intends to preserve the propriety of philosophical discourse despite the community's continuous dissent on central issues, his immediate acceptance of contextualism seems the overlook the stronger case that philosophical assertions often hinge on objective standards—such as logical validity in narrowly theoretical domains and congruence with experimental findings when discussions veer closer to cognitive and social science—which render certain statements more pertinent to knowledge than others. Instead of exonerating philosophical discourse, this decision to trade the more demanding epistemic norms of knowledge or empirical adequacy for reasonable in-group intelligibility forces us to concede that collectives which are usually considered epistemi-

cally irresponsible—such as science deniers or conspiracy theorists—actually do satisfy a more forbearing epistemic norm, given that their assertions are entirely in sync with other members.

Miranda Fricker proceeds with a sensible review of her work on epistemic injustice and recognizes that individuals are seldom able to fully overcome the biases they had internalized by growing up in a prejudiced society. To what extent, then, to these cognitive constrains pardon us from blame for wrongful epistemic conduct? Although implicit biases—as they run counter to our consciously held values and therefore cannot be considered intentional—aren't conventionally culpable, this falls short of excusing our behavior. Making use of Bernard Williams' definition of agent-regret as the appropriate response of someone who had experienced a case of moral bad luck, Fricker argues that otherwise conscientious perpetrators of epistemic injustice should regret their misconduct, reflect upon their prejudiced beliefs and encourage institutional measures which will prevent their peers from repeating similar mistakes.

After this brief foray into practical concerns, Hans Schmid wonders whether group self-knowledge is as groundless (meaning, as automatic and as non-inferential) as its individual counterpart. Albeit he first shows that Anscombe's criteria for individual intentionality—namely, first-person identity, perspective, commitment, and authority—aren't intuitively compatible with the collective model, Schmid ends up concluding that genuine group belonging does require a strong sense of joint commitment and identification which render the idea of groundless group self-knowledge sensible (72).

Ethics. In the volume's first essay on moral epistemology, Elizabeth Anderson offers a rich account of how social moral learning—the collective acquisition of true beliefs about our ethical duties to others—may be obstructed if we indulge in sanitized interpretations of historical injustice. When entire communities agree on self-laudatory narratives of their previous moral excellence—which Anderson illustrates with the fact that slavery wasn't abolished due to the autodidactic moral learning of Western intellectuals, but, instead, because subalterns continuously sought human rights—they fail to acknowledge that only the disadvantaged have substantial epistemic access to the urgency of their problems (78). The historical facts that whites first envisioned a gradual abolition of slavery that would take decades and then offered freed blacks unlivable wages for working the same fields they had previously occupied as slaves make the problem quite salient. What Anderson appeals for is a kind of epistemic democracy wherein moral progress requires those in privileged social positions to recognize the humanity of their interlocutors and to, when crafting policy, take their experiences into account on terms of equality.

Michael Brady follows up with the original claim that emotions—both individual and group—can have epistemic value inasmuch as they direct our attention towards certain events and compel us to appraise whether they had warranted such an emotional response, thus promoting understanding. Arguing that individual emotions amount to group counterparts through emotional contagion and affective conformity, Brady concludes that shared dismay with social events makes groups inquire about what is indeed going on and, consequently, may encourage greater transparency from governing

bodies (109). He does note, however, that misinformed group emotions can cause severe epistemic harm and hence require situational assessments.

Next up, Glen Pettigrove wonders whether the propositional model of revising beliefs within groups can explain how moral communities change complex opinions with holistic content (121). Heavily drawing on Margaret Gilbert's collective epistemology, he uses the example of the Presbyterian Church to show that revisions of moral knowledge do not arise when members merely replace one proposition with another, but instead require shifts in comprehensive—or holistic—moral doctrines.

Politics. Fabienne Peter inquires whether democracy can be justified in the light of its epistemic value alone, rather than by appealing to practical concerns. Simply put, if we can resolve political matters by making a correct decision, presupposing that there is an objectively correct choice to be made, then democracy is legitimate inasmuch as its decision-making procedures reliably produce such outcomes. The problem here lies in what she calls "the authority dilemma" (134). As long as there is a relevant third-person authority—say, an expert in some field—who is particularly knowledgeable about a matter of collective interest, aggregating the opinions of comparative laypeople will not seem like an advisable route to social policy. Peter first presents a case for deliberative democracy, which stresses the importance of exchanging reasons and acknowledging plural perspectives by way of public debate, in place of mere aggregation or majority voting. Next up, assuming that certain questions—such as highly contested, theoretical and ideologically laden issues—do not entail a procedure-independent truth, she concludes that the deliberative process is in itself epistemically valuable because it sensitizes agents to different opinions. This line of reasoning leads to the obvious conclusion that we should only entrust decision-making to democratic collectives in matters lacking an objective third-person authority (149). What remains to be explored is the precise domain of such purely subjective topics. Peter's portrayal of minimum wage policies as a subject that—although it is undoubtedly a matter of public dissent—requires no expert knowledge could be contested, so future discussions might benefit from a more careful distinction.

Stephanie Collins and Holly Lawford-Smith proceed by inquiring about the transfer of duties between individuals and states. This process, in their view, includes several epistemic components: individual members recognize their country in compelling it to discharge duties on their behalf, the state acknowledges its individual members by distributing smaller duties (such as taxes), members intentionally participate by fulfilling their obligations and both parties engage in bidirectional transfers of knowledge concerning their ethical demands (160). Individuals are, moreover, only justified in transferring their duties to the state if they can reasonably believe that it will truly act on their behalf.

In the final essay on politics, Kay Spiekermann turns to behavioral economics in explaining how agents tend to ignore—or distort—readily available evidence about the ethical opacity of their actions. Having identified four types of "moral wriggle room" (182) wherein agents deliberately avoid facts which entail moral obligations, convince themselves that moral norms are more lenient than might seem or deceive others about the scope of their

rights, Spiekermann locates them in discriminatory practices of "white ignorance." In this sense, whites tend to embrace faulty beliefs (such as the stances that freed black slaves had equal opportunities to whites or that black communities are only marginally disadvantaged) which diminish normative constraints on their behavior. Spiekermann does imply, however, that encouraging agents to voice their ethical values—and thus identify with them—can eliminate self-serving biases by rendering cognitive dissonance more explicit. Echoing Fricker's work on internalized prejudice, he concludes the essay by admitting that "it remains unclear whether training individuals to resist self-serving biases can succeed" (188).

Philosophy of science. James Owen Weatherall and Margaret Gilbert introduce the final section by combining Gilbert's seminal work on joint commitment and Thomas Kuhn's description of "normal science" (203). Arguing that group membership imposes certain responsibilities on its members, including a heightened sense of identification with the collective and a disregard for outliers' opinions, they use this joint account to show that the string theory community's "unusually" dogmatic behavior in contemporary physics only serves to confirm Gilbert's model. The upshot here is that the apparent epistemic irresponsibility of scientific communities—assuming that propensities to dismiss all opposing evidence and believe desirable results without checking don't live up to most methodological standards—isn't an occasional deviation from proper conduct, but a natural feature of joint commitment. This conclusion may serve as a sound basis for exploring common constraints on scientific progress.

Torsten Wilholt closes the volume by attempting to locate the source of trustworthiness in collaborative scientific research. The problem here is how one can assess whether a scientific collective is worthy of trust without appealing to traditional indicators of reliability such as institutional reputation. Noting that the social organization of scientific work has become so diffuse that it is almost impossible to attribute trust by employing previous track records, Wilholt argues that researchers can rely on shared methodological standards (229). The choice of a particular methodology, moreover, usually entails a trade-off between the reliability out its results—both positive and negative—and its power, or the number of generated results. Given that the dilemma between a small number of accurate results and more fecund, but less reliable research cannot be resolved by appealing to truth, researchers ought to attune their choices to the gravity of the matter at hand (233).

Regardless of the breadth of covered topics and the considerable quality of individual essays, the volume is better described as a compilation of different approaches to both collective epistemic agents and their individual members, than as a comprehensive introduction into collective epistemology. Having said this, an informed reader will surely find Fricker's and Brady's editorial work deserving of close philosophical scrutiny, and we can hope that this new territory will generate fruitful developments in the domain of collective and social epistemology.

HANA SAMARŽIJA
University of Zagreb, Zagreb, Croatia